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NOV 20 1978

TO: The Secretary

FROM: ARA - Viron P. Vaky

Peoples Temple in Guyana: Department Assistance to Codel Ryan

The Peoples Temple (a socio-religious organization of about 5,000 members with its headquarters in San Francisco) has been in Guyana since 1973 when they obtained a lease of 27,000 acres in Northwest Guyana to establish an agricultural community. Initially our Embassy had little contact with the group until April, 1977 when large numbers of its members began to arrive. Embassy Consular Officers began making periodic visits to the community in August, 1977 to perform normal consular services and to respond to requests from individuals that their relatives were being mistreated. At no time during these visits were the officers able to substantiate such allegations.

Our relations with the GOG vis-a-vis the Peoples Temple were routine. While both the Embassy and the GOG were aware of reports of mistreatment, these were never confirmed. The Embassy in its contacts with the government adhered to a policy that these were law abiding citizens until proved otherwise.

The Government of Guyana (GOG) has had good relations with the Peoples Temple. This relationship developed as the Temple invested heavily in building their agricultural community as a model of cooperative socialism that supported the GOG's domestic program of opening the interior of Guyana to agricultural development.

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YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- Our Embassy has maintained close contact with the Temple and GOG officials since the arrival of large numbers of American citizens to the agricultural community.

-- Consular Officers made periodic visits to the agricultural community to perform normal consular functions and to investigate allegations of mistreatment.

-- Of the numerous Temple members interviewed (approximately 75 over the past year) not one confirmed any of the allegations of mistreatment. (The Consular Officer held personal, private meetings with the individuals who identified themselves with their passports).

-- The GOG supported the Peoples Temple program since it dovetailed with their primary domestic objective of opening the interior of Guyana to agricultural development.

-- Our Embassy Officers in Georgetown did discuss Peoples Temple activities with working level contacts of the GOG although they were naturally careful not to cast aspersions on a group of presumably law abiding American citizens.

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Our Assistance to Codel Ryan

Beginning September 15, the Department and Embassy Georgetown have actively assisted the Codel in its preparations for the trip to Guyana. From October 15 ARA/CAR had almost daily contact with staff members particularly Congressman Ryan's legal counsel, Ms. Speiers, in planning and coordinating the visit. The Codel was apprised of formidable logistic problems that would confront the group because of the remote location of the community. Numerous discussions were held concerning the structure of the organization and past alleged illegal activities of the Temple. The possibility that the Temple would be suspicious of the purposes of the visit and might refuse the Codel entry into their agricultural community was also reviewed.

Moreover the Codel was informed that should they be refused admittance, the GOG would be reluctant to pressure the Temple to admit the party on the grounds that they have a right to their privacy if they are not in violation of local law. Department legal officers also briefed Codel staff members on the parameters of Embassy authority over private Americans in a foreign country.

The subject of violence was mentioned although not in the context of the possibility of an assault

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on the Codel but rather the alleged threats made by the Temple against defecting members

Congressman Ryan had made considerable research into the Peoples Temple and appeared to be familiar with the charges of maltreatment. He indicated through his legal counsel to accept many of the recommendations made by the Department and the Embassy, including notifying the Peoples Temple of the purpose of the visit.

YOUR TALKING POINTS

-- Congressman Ryan first discussed the visit on September 15, with Assistant Secretary Vaky and members of his staff.

-- From this initial meeting, the Department was in close and frequent contact with the Congressman's staff in planning the visit.

-- In planning the visit, Department and Codel discussed reports of rumored maltreatment of Temple members and results of previous Embassy visits and inquiries at the agricultural community.

-- Department and Embassy Georgetown advised Codel of the formidable logistics problems due to the remote location of the townsite.

-- Department Officers informed Codel staff of possibility that Peoples Temple may view visit with suspicion and refuse Codel entry into agricultural community. The GOG would be reluctant to pressure the Temple in receiving group on grounds they have a right to their privacy if not in violation of local law.

-- Embassy Georgetown fully coordinated visit with GOG who provided logistical support for visit.